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ABSTRACT

These four papers by a reference librarian discuss the potential for students at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Oswego to engage in a positive academic career that will have a significant impact not only on their growth as people, but also on their future endeavors. The first paper, "Self-Definition: Naming Yourself in a College Environment," explores the diversity of campus activities, and encourages students to become involved in some of them to continue their self-development as well as to make connections with other people. The second paper, "Education and 'The Color Purple'; 'No matter what happen, Nettie steady try to teach me what go on in the world,'" describes two people who had a major influence on the speaker as a young girl, and mentions some of the people at SUNY Oswego--e.g., roommates, friends, professors, counselors, residence hall directors--who will help students continue to learn "what go on in the world." The third paper, "SUNY Oswego Students Research the Topic of Abuse," provides examples of ways that Oswego students have demonstrated concern and scholarship in this area by elaborating on three specific topics of abuse that have been the subject of research papers written by undergraduate students: female circumcision in Africa, violence in families around the world, and terrorism and torture. The final paper, "Arts in Education," offers references to art in "The Color Purple" and describes some of the opportunities for students at Oswego to appreciate art, participate in art, create art, and develop a knowledge of the visual and performing arts. (DB)

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COLLEGE ORIENTATION

THREE THEMES FROM ALICE WALKER'S

THE COLOR PURPLE

by

Nancy Seale Osborne

Academic Component of Education
SUNY Oswego
July 1990

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SELF-DEFINITION: NAMING YOURSELF IN A COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT

"ACE" PANEL PRESENTATION

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The process of self-definition, of naming ourselves, began when we were tiny. How many of you look at baby pictures and die laughing? You think to yourself: "How could my father dare to take that picture of me in the bathtub?" or "Who is that funny-looking little kid with the punk hair style, and why is she frowning?" (Your mother tells you, "It wasn't punk, dear. You had just rolled out of bed!") You were learning to name yourself: "I am brave." "I am capable." "I am courageous." You knew that you were courageous the first time you dove off the diving board!

Peter Maize, a student at Arcadia High School in California, wrote a graphic, beautiful poem about self-definition. (1) He calls it:

GRAFFITI

Scrawled on the wall

so all can see it.

Spray-can expression

ten inches tall.

Language of the cities,

street corner art,

gang poetry.

Drawn on a canvas of stone.

Inspired by boredom,

a portrait of frustration.

How can I talk

so you can hear me?

How can I live

so you won't ignore me?

How else can I stand up

and tell you-

I'm here!

At SUNY Oswego you have a unique opportunity to continue the exciting process of self-definition, of naming yourself with a rich variety of adjectives. You might find yourself dressed "to the nines" in the Spring Black Student Union fashion show. You might get involved in student government, serving as a senator to speak for issues of concern to you and to other students. You might become a peer counselor for AIDS education. You might write for *The Oswegonian* or *The Pendulum:* timely editorials, erotic poetry, caustic commentary. You might wish your Jewish friends a good inscription for the coming year at Rosh Hashanah. You might take a photography class, and receive the distinction of taking the three millionth picture of an Oswego sunset! You might join GALA, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance, who went to Washington last year to see the last showing of The Quilt on the Washington Mall, and to participate in the March for the Homeless. If you have a learning or physical disability, or even if you don't, but like to get to know some neat people, you might join LEO, the Learning Enhancement Organization, which sponsored Disability Awareness Day last year.

There <u>is</u> a rich diversity at Oswego. Cultural diversity. Human

diversity. You have the opportunity to define yourself as a person with a keen intellect, a rare and wonderful sense of humor, a weird way of looking at things, a person to be depended upon, somebody a friend might study physics with. These new ways of naming yourself won't come overnight. And it won't be easy to become even more wonderful than you are already!

You will need to take some 8:00 am classes. Pay attention in classes, most especially to professors who don't have English as their first language. "I tell my students," says one of our professors, "that I got a PhD. in a language which was not my first. And I tell them that I can speak three languages. And then I tell them to remember these things, especially if they have to work a little bit harder to understand me, or to sit in the front row and lean forward to catch every word!"

You will want to look around you and make connections: learn that when one person is oppressed, we are <u>all</u> oppressed; look at an atlas with an international student, because everybody likes to talk about where they come from! Offer to become a part of the Adopt-a-grandparent program; tutor (or be tutored) in calculus...

The possibilities for connections at Oswego are endless. Also, remember Celie, who says in *The Color Purple,* "Us both be hitting Nettie's schoolbooks pretty hard, cause we got to be smart..." At SUNY Oswego, you have the valuable opportunity for self-definition, a chance to name yourself without a "spray can expression ten inches tall."

(1) Johnson, Eric W. *Our World into Words: Learn to Write-and Enjoy It!* New York: Bantam Books, 1977, p. 46.

(2) Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1982, p. 11.

EDUCATION AND *THE COLOR PURPLE:*
'No matter what happen, Nettie steady try to teach me what go on in the world.'

"ACE" PANEL PRESENTATION

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Those of us who have had "Netties" in our lives are very fortunate. I look at two important people in my young life who 'steady tried to teach me what go on in the world.' One was a young dairy farmer, Genevieve Smith. She had the meanest old rooster in west Texas, one who kept his beady eye on me, from the time I crossed over the cattle guard at the edge of the pasture until the time I threw open the kitchen door. If I didn't run fast enough, he flew against my legs, ugly yellow talon claws ripping at my bluejeans. Genevieve Smith always told me I could outwit the mean old rooster, so I prided myself on finding ways to keep him guessing about my whereabouts.

We fed the Smith family baby lambs out of big old Nehi orange soda bottles with nipples cut from old innertubes. It was an important chore, and one that I could be depended upon to do

well.

Genevieve Smith was not an educated woman. But I saw her run an entire small dairy farm operation, scrub pails and barn floors, handle unannounced visits from the health department, worry over keeping the books, and still take time for me, a small girl of eight years whose mother died unexpectedly.

Genevieve Smith was a good Democrat. She adored President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who managed to bring people out of the grief and poverty of the Great Depression with ingenuity and dignity. When he died, she sat me on her scratchy frieze sofa, and gave me a scrapbook she had made for me about FDR. "I want you to know something about this country's history," she told me seriously, and in a voice that I will always remember. An eight year old, you see, is not too young to have a memorable history lesson from a young west Texas dairy farmer. Like Nettie in *The Color Purple,* she 'steady tried to teach me what do on in the world.'

The second person in my young life who taught me that I was a learner, who made conversation with me as if my ideas were

as important as anyone's in the whole world, was the woman I went to live with after my mother died. Pearle Stanford was a bookkeeper for the Chevrolet dealer in a tiny west Texas town. She taught me how to observe people, to find out what they needed, and to be of use to them. Because of her I learned to stop every day to say hello to the ninety-one year old doctor and his ninety-two year old wife who eagerly awaited a visitor to join them in their wicker rocking chairs on the front porch. I listened with big eyes to stories of baby's births in tornado winds and rancher's arms chewed off by rusty, recalcitrant machinery.

Pearle Stanford taught me to find work that a ten-year old could do successfully : painting lawn furniture, picking up pecans, bringing groceries home to a man with no use of his legs, cutting out Dick Tracy comic strips to use to teach English to new immigrants from Mexico. Being useful was one of the best things I learned and was what 'steady taught me what go on in the world.'

Each of you have people like this in your own lives. The strength and courage you have learned from these people will help you build

upon that foundation, which you bring with you to Oswego. Everywhere you look at this college there will be people here who 'steady can help you see what go on in the world.' Some of these people will be your roommates; some will be suitemates, or a friend who lives in another dorm, or off-campus; some will be non-traditional or adult learner students, who bring experience and wisdom to their classrooms. Others who are here to 'steady help you see what go on in the world' are professors, residence hall directors, counselors, librarians, and food service people. Talk to these people... get to know them... ask them questions. Be an advocate for yourself as you learn to make this system of education work for you. 'Steady, you will indeed see what go on in the world' because you will be making it happen for yourself. Best of luck to you in this exciting venture!

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SUNY OSWEGO STUDENTS RESEARCH THE TOPIC OF ABUSE

"ACE" PANEL PRESENTATION

(Mr._____) Wives is like children.
You have to let 'em know who got the upper hand.
Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating.

Being a reference librarian, I work with students from all majors who are involved in research in Penfield Library. The topic of abuse covers a wide variety of research topics. They range from female genital mutilation in Africa and Egypt, to global violence in families (including spouse abuse, child abuse, and elder abuse), to torture as examined and defined by the organization Amnesty International, which monitors torture worldwide. Let me elaborate on these three specific topics of abuse, each of which have been the subject of research papers written by undergraduate students at SUNY Oswego, with whom I have worked in Penfield Library.

Genital mutilation, also called female circumcision, excision, or infibulation, is extensively practiced in Africa and the Middle East. Tashi in *THE COLOR PURPLE,* was "resigned" to undergo the female

initiation ceremony "to make her people feel better." (p. 202) It may be performed by older village women on babies as young as a few days old or on girls in their late adolescence. The 'operation' is rarely performed with surgical tools or skills or through the knowledge of anatomy or by the use of anesthesia. Genital mutilation is justified in these ways: it prepares girls for marriage by ensuring premarital purity. It lessens sexual desire, reducing the temptation for girls and women to have intercourse before marriage, a distinct advantage to societies which require that young women be virgins at the time of marriage. In some instances it is demanded by religious faiths. Genital mutilation has staggering physical and mental health consequences for women. Infections are frequently fatal. Hemorrhage and other extreme physical complications are common. A senior Communication Studies major presented her findings on global genital mutilation at SUNY Oswego's 1989 Quest and Honors Day, an opportunity for students to present their research to the campus community.

Violence in families across the globe is another topic frequently researched by undergraduate students in Penfield Library. It is somewhat difficult to find information on international domestic

violence, which, like rape is seriously underreported. Some of the limited information on this worldwide problem indicates that in Peru, 70 per cent of all crimes reported to the police are of women being beaten by their partners; in one year (1980) in Sao Paulo, Brazil, 772 women were reported killed by their husbands; in Japan, wife-beating has been the second most frequent reason for divorce initiated by women. Battered women's shelters, most of which are filled to capacity at all times, exist because of women organizing locally. They are sustained in the face of much opposition and harassment and usually without support from local or national governments. Domestic violence stems, in part, from the basic fact that throughout the world, women are widely less valued than men, girls are valued less than boys. Many of the students writing research papers for their English 102 composition classes choose to write about abusive family relationships in the United States or in other countries.

The third subject I mentioned to you, which has been the subject of student research in Penfield Library is that of international terrorism and torture. International Studies 200 is a course in which students have large-group instruction during which

they have the magnificent opportunity to hear a wide variety of speakers about international issues and concerns. The president of Amnesty International spoke in that class in 1989. Having just returned from Chile, he was able to give first-hand information about human rights abuses. He began his speech with an honest and horrifying description of beds designed for the torture of victims, electrical equipment used to shock political prisoners, and brainwashing techniques destined to break the will and spirit of prisoners jailed for freely speaking the truth as they saw it. There is a student group of Amnesty International on the SUNY Oswego campus, comprised of students who have an awareness of and knowledge about human rights abuses internationally. For an article for the college newspaper, *The Oswegonian,* several students spent hours of research time in Penfield Library, accessing government documents, microfilm copies of *The New York Times,* and reference materials published by Amnesty International.

These are but three of the ways Oswego students have demonstrated concern and scholarship on the subject of abuse. There are times when the media or individuals refer derogatorily to

college students as "self-centered," "uncaring," "out for themselves," and, an adjective which I abhor, "apathetic." When I hear these statements made about students, I have an overwhelming desire to "slime" the speaker, or to write a scathing letter to a television producer, or to whip out, for demonstration purposes, some of the articles and papers written by thoughtful, concerned SUNY Oswego students. Oswego students are aware of, interested about, and willing to examine the implications of abuse in a variety of national and international settings. You are <u>not</u> a part of an "apathetic" generation. You are part of a generation of concern and change. What you learn at SUNY Oswego has the potential to change you; it has, as well, the potential to change the world.

ARTS IN EDUCATION

"ACE" PANEL PRESENTATION

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The Color Purple is full of art. Among the grief, the despair, the poverty, Celie makes beauty.

> I'm busy making pants for Sofia now.
> One leg be purple, one leg be red.
> I dream Sofia wearing these pants,
> one day she was jumping over the moon.
> Amen, Your sister, Celie

On her way to the juke-joint, where Sofia and Harpo argue over whether women can be pall bearers, Celie decides to "show her colors:"

> ...I feels different. Look different.
> Got on some dark blue pants
> and a white silk shirt that looks righteous.
> Little red flat-heel slippers,
> and a flower in my hair.

Affirming her African heritage, Nettie exclaims about the artworks taken from Africa and brought to English museums.

> And the things they have brought back!
> We spent a morning in one of their museums,
> and it was packed with jewels, furniture, fur carpets,
> swords, clothing... *thousands* of vases, jars, masks,
> bowls, baskets, statues... Africans once had a better
> civilization than the European...

In discovering her African cultural heritage, Nettie had to go to England to see these artifacts, for they were no longer in her homeland Africa.

I would like to talk with you about some of the opportunities for you in the next four years at SUNY Oswego to appreciate art, to participate in art, to create art, and to develop a knowledge of the visual and performing arts.

We have a museum studies minor. An assignment for one of the museum studies classes is to begin with an artifact or collectible, something possibly belonging to a favorite aunt or grandparent, or purchased in an antique (or junk) store: a presidential pin, preferably older than the Nixon years! Or possibly, as one student researched, a 1940 pressed tin condom box, with the statement on the side: "For safety's sake..." Another Museum Studies student had his grandfather's World War I binoculars in a thin, ragged leather case. Beginning with this artifact, one begins to research the monetary and societal values of it, by searching in reference materials, books and periodical articles in the library. Determining the value of the piece of art, the next step is to write a research paper about placing it in a museum context. The presidential pin, for example, might make up an exhibit of presidential memorabilia: bumper stickers, if they made them back then, presidential posters, or pictures of the cars in which presidents rode for parades. The condom box might be set in a museum exhibit of the history of contraception. And the binoculars... you can probably think of a possible exhibit if you have been to the Smithsonian: instruments which contain ground glass; spy glasses used on ocean-going vessels.... At any rate, a museum studies minor, along with a history major, offer one the opportunity to prepare to work in a museum, art gallery, historical society, or possibly to work for the National Park Service doing living history presentations.

Another student art opportunity is to take computer graphics in the Department of Technology. Other courses in this department teach students the properties of wood (one student is refinishing a grand piano for the Advanced Wood Technology class); how to design for and work with metals (one student made a magnificently designed fireplace set: tongs, shovel, brush, and poker). The design

classes in Technology are a wonder to behold: students wrack their brains, comb old Oswego County barns and fields, and come up with works of art worthy of being written up in *ART NEWS.*

Each semester students lose hours of sleep to practice, practice, practice lines for dramatic presentation; they try out for the opportunity to sweat several nights in front of the stage lights, have their pictures in the student newspaper, *The Oswegonian,* and hope that some of the photos are good enough to be in the college yearbook, *The Ontarian.* Both of these student publications, as well as the newspaper, *The Pendulum,* require extensive artistic work: writing, editing, layout. And <u>everybody</u>, simply everybody, reads them, discusses them, argues about them, loves them, or hates them. <u>No one</u> is neutral on this campus about student publications. Another publication, *The Great Lake Review,* the creative results of students in the English Department Writing Arts Program, highlights photography, prose, and poetry. It is a great feeling for a student to see her or his poem, surrounded with white space, in beautiful print, for the very first time.

Students who work in clay have a distinct, red-under-the-fingernails look. We have a fine studio art program at SUNY Oswego. Faculty in the Art Department exhibit their own work in shows locally, statewide, and throughout the country. Some work in clay, some in silver. Some specialize in photography. Painters work and teach in oil, acrylics, watercolor. Several of the sculptures about campus: the clock outside Penfield Library, and the new fountain, were designed by Art Department faculty member Nick D'Innocenzo. He also designed the seagull sculpture in Penfield Library and the bronze sculpture in the entrance of Swetman Hall.

Each spring Tyler Art Gallery has the Bachelor of Arts show in which students' studio works are displayed. During the rest of the year, Tyler's two galleries have exhibits which are both artistic and educational in nature. And Friday night art openings are wonderful to attend. Not only do you meet the artists and examine their works, but the food is always good!

The State Singers, a student choral group, perform so magnificently that they were rewarded by a choral trip to Montserrat, enjoying and exploring the Emerald Caribbean island measuring six by eleven miles, bisected by mountains. Instrumental student artists have the opportunity to develop their skills and share their artistry. There is an art to learning and speaking a foreign language. Student programs overseas offer the occasion for students to live with families, speaking the language of the country in which they are guests.

SUNY Oswego holds a myriad of possibilities for you, either as a producer or as a consumer of art. Open your eyes and look around you. If you have questions about aspects of art and education while you are here, please feel free to ask questions. If one of us cannot answer you, we will be glad to direct you to someone who has the information that you need.

And, speaking of works of art, when the sun shines in Oswego, we look forward to a magnificent sunset display of sky, water, clouds, horizon, and colors. Bring your camera to Oswego with you. You may have the opportunity to take the 35,000th photograph of an Oswego sunset. Perhaps you will enter it in the annual photo contest on campus, and win first prize!